

Helsinki 22.11.2004

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Hakija
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CTT Cancer Targeting Technologies Oy
Helsinki

Patenttihakemus nro
Patent application no

20031528

Tekemispäivä
Filing date

17.10.2003

Kansainvälinen luokka
International class

A61K

Keksinnön nimitys
Title of invention

"Therapeutic liposome composition and process for preparation thereof"
(Terapeuttinen liposomikoostumus ja menetelmä sen valmistamiseksi)

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Therapeutic liposome composition and process for preparation thereof

Field of the Invention

5 The present invention relates to targeted cancer therapy and concerns specifically preparation of a liposomal therapeutic substance, in specific doxorubicin, which is coated with small matrix metalloproteinase inhibitors to improve the targeting of liposomes to cancer cells, and to enhance the uptake thereof to such cells. The invention thus provides therapeutic and imaging liposome compositions, a method for preparing such compositions for
10 treating and diagnosing cancer. The compositions can be used for improving targeting of liposomes to tumour cells, for enhancing the uptake of liposomes by tumour cells, and for selected liposomal delivery of chemotherapeutic agents into tumour cells.

Background of the Invention

15 In chemotherapy, only a fraction of the drug reaches cancer cells, whereas the rest of the drug may damage normal tissues. Adverse effects can be reduced by the administration of cancer drugs encapsulated in liposomes (Lasic *et al.*, 1995). Improved liposome compositions have been described, so as to enhance their stability and to prolong their lifetime in
20 the circulation (Tardi *et al.*, 1996). Among such compositions, phospholipids conjugated to monomethoxy polyethylene glycol (PEG) have been widely used since 1984 when Sears coupled, via an amide link, carboxy PEG and purified soy phosphatidyl ethanolamine (PE) (Sears, 1984). The addition of PEG onto the liposome surface attracts a water shell surrounding the liposome. This shell prevents the adsorption of various plasma proteins
25 (opsonins) to the liposome surface so that liposomes are not recognized and taken up by the reticulo-endothelial system. Enhanced selectivity can be obtained by attaching to the surface of the liposome specific antibodies or small peptides recognizing plasma membrane antigens of the target cell, thus augmenting the uptake of the liposome by the cell (Storm and Crommelin, 1998; Dagar *et al.*, 2001; Penate Medina *et al.*, 2001).

30 Matrix metalloproteinases (MMPs) constitute a family of enzymes capable of degrading the basement and extracellular matrix. MMPs can be divided into subgroups, one of which constitutes the type IV collagenases or gelatinases, MMP-2 and MMP-9. Elevated or unregulated expression of gelatinases and other MMPs can contribute to the pathogenesis of

several diseases, including tumour angiogenesis and metastasis, rheumatoid arthritis, multiple sclerosis, and periodontitis. Random phage peptide libraries have been screened in order to develop a selective inhibitor against this MMP subgroup. The most active peptide derived, abbreviated CTT, was found to selectively inhibit the activities of MMP-2 and MMP-9 (Koivunen *et al.*, 1999). Experiments in mice bearing tumour xenografts showed that CTT-displaying phages were accumulated in the tumour vasculature after their intravenous injection into the recipient mice. Targeting of the phage to tumours was inhibited by the co-administration of the CTT peptide (Koivunen *et al.*, 1999). As both MMP-2 (Toth *et al.*, 1997) and MMP-9 (Brooks *et al.*, 1996) are bound by specific cell surface receptors, these enzymes represent potential receptors for liposome targeting to invasive cells, such as tumour cells and angiogenic endothelial cells. By mixing CTT peptide with liposomes, enhanced tumour targeting and uptake can be achieved (Penate Medina *et al.*, 2001).

Screening of phage display libraries allows rapid identification of peptides binding to a target. However, functional analysis of the phage sequences and their reproduction as soluble and stable peptides are often the most time-consuming parts in the screening. An intein-directed methodology can be used for synthesis and design of peptides obtained by phage display (Björklund *et al.*, 2003). Using this technology, a library of peptide derivatives was made. A novel CTT peptide derivative (CTT2) was identified that has improved solubility in physiological solutions and is biologically active.

Summary of the Invention

We describe here methods to covalently attach a small peptide, such as CTT2 peptide, to synthetic lipids. The peptide/lipid composition obtained forms micelles in aqueous solutions and can be incorporated to liposomes. Because of the targeting properties of the peptide used, this invention creates a novel and versatile targeting tool for different types of liposomal formulations of pharmaceuticals and imaging agents. The use of the targeting tool is shown to improve the biodistribution profile and the therapeutical efficacy of the drug formulation.

Brief Description of the Drawings

Figure 1. Thin layer chromatography (TLC) analysis of the coupling reaction. Lane 1, CTT2 peptide control; Lane 2, DSPE-PEG-NHS control; Lane 5, the supernatant after the diethyl ether treatment; Lane 8, the pellet suspension after the diethyl ether treatment.

Figure 2. The result of the HPLC gel filtration to separate the CTT2-PEG-DSPE compound from the CTT2 peptide. The first peak shown in the graph contains the product, CTT2-PEG-DSPE. The last peak shown in the graph contains the CTT2 peptide.

Figure 3. a) MALDI-TOF analysis of the CTT2 peptide.
b) MALDI-TOF analysis of the DSPE-PEG-NHS.
c) MALDI-TOF analysis of the CTT2-PEG-DSPE after the HPLC purification.

Figure 4. Tumour accumulation of CTT2-coated Doxil®/Caelyx® and Doxil®/Caelyx® in ovarian cancer xenograft mice over a period of 96 hours.

Figure 5. Survival of tumour-bearing mice after the treatment with different drug/liposome formulations.

Detailed Description of the Invention

The invention describes a process to covalently attach a peptide to synthetic lipids to form a targeting composition. Preferably the peptide is a hydrophilic peptide, more preferably a small matrix metalloproteinase inhibitor having tumour targeting capacity. In a most preferred embodiment of the invention the peptide is the cyclic CTT2 peptide having the amino acid sequence GRENYHGCTTHWGFTLC, which peptide is used as an efficient targeting tool for a liposomal formulation of pharmaceuticals or imaging agents. The peptide (CTT2) is first covalently attached (coupled) to the end group of the poly(ethylene glycol) polymer chain of the PEG phospholipids, DSPE-PEG. The CTT2-PEG-DSPE suspension, which forms micelles in an aqueous solution, is then incorporated to the pre-formed liposomes that are loaded with pharmaceuticals or imaging agents. Because of the targeting property of the CTT2 peptide, this invention creates a novel and versatile target-

ing tool for different types of liposomal formulations of pharmaceuticals and imaging agents. The use of this targeting tool is shown to improve the biodistribution profile and the therapeutical efficacy of the drug formulation. Separating the coupling and the incorporation steps makes the system versatile. The physical stress imposed on the peptide and its
5 bond to the PEG phospholipid by conventional liposome formation procedure is avoided.

In principle, any peptide having suitable targeting capacity can be attached to a liposome with any composition and loaded with any substances. Consequently, the liposome can carry as a pharmaceutical a chemotherapeutic agent, e.g. doxorubicin, cisplatin or paclitaxel. The liposome can also carry an imaging agent. The peptides can be attached to suitable nanoparticles as well.
10

Useful peptides having suitable targeting capacity include for instance the matrix metalloproteinase inhibitory peptides described in the international patent applications WO
15 99/47550 and WO 02/072618.

Consequently, a general object of the present invention is a targeting composition, which comprises a peptide having tumour-targeting capacity, attached to suitable lipid. The composition obtained can be used as a targeting moiety in various medical and diagnostic applications to direct a liposome to the desired target. The method of preparing such a targeting composition having tumour-targeting capacity comprises covalent attachment of a hydrophilic peptide to a synthetic derivative of polyethylene glycol.
20

Another object of this invention is a method for preparing a therapeutic or imaging liposome composition, comprising the steps of obtaining liposomes carrying at least one chemotherapeutic agent or imaging agent, preparing a targeting composition having tumour targeting capacity, by covalently attaching a hydrophilic peptide to a synthetic derivative of polyethylene glycol, and combining the liposomes and the targeting composition to form a suspension.
25

30

Still another object of the invention is a method for treating cancer in a patient, comprising the steps of obtaining liposomes carrying at least one chemotherapeutic agent, obtaining a targeting composition comprising a hydrophilic peptide and a synthetic derivative of poly-

ethylene glycol, combining the liposomes and the targeting composition to form a suspension, and administering the suspension obtained to the patient.

Still another object of the invention is a diagnostic or imaging composition, comprising a targeting composition comprising a hydrophilic peptide and a synthetic derivative of polyethylene glycol, and liposomes carrying at least one imaging agent, or a diagnostic test kit including such a composition.

Abbreviations:

10	AUC	Area Under Curve
	CTT2	amidated cyclic GRENYHGCTTHWGFTLC peptide
	Doxil®/Caelyx®	commercially available doxorubicin HCl liposome injection composition by Ortho Biotech, a subsidiary of Johnson & Johnson/Schering Plough Corporation
15	CMC	critical micellar concentration
	DMF	dimethylformamide
	DSPE-PEG-NHS	1,2-Distearoyl- <i>sn</i> -Glycero-3-Phosphoethanolamine- <i>n</i> -[poly(ethylene glycol)]- <i>N</i> -hydroxysuccinamidyl carbonate
	HPLC	high-performance liquid chromatography
20	MMP	matrix metalloproteinase
	PEG	poly(ethylene glycol)
	SL	stealth liposome
	TFA	trifluoroacetic acid
	TLC	thin-layer chromatography

25

Experimental

Peptide coupling

In this procedure, CTT2 peptides were covalently attached to PEG phospholipids through the chemical reaction between the terminal amine of the peptide and the functional NHS (hydroxysuccinimidyl) group at the end of the poly(ethylene glycol) polymer chain of the PEG phospholipid. The reaction between the terminal amine and the active succinimidyl ester of the PEG carboxylic acid produced a stable amide linkage. Different molar ratios of

the peptide and the PEG phospholipid, as well as the reaction time and temperature were tested to optimize the coupling reaction.

The pH of dimethylformamide (DMF) (BDH Laboratory Supplies) was adjusted to 8.0 by trifluoroacetic acid (TFA) (Merck). Four milligrams of synthetic amidated GRENYHG-CTTHWGFTLC peptide (CTT2) (Neosystem S.A.) and 8.6 milligrams of 1,2-distearoyl-*sn*-glycero-3-phosphoethanolamine-*n*-[poly(ethylene glycol)3400]-*N*-hydroxysuccinamidyl carbonate (DSPE-PEG-NHS 3400) (Nektar Corporation) were dissolved in 1 ml DMF (pH 8.0). The mixture (molar ratio 1:1) was incubated at +37°C for two hours with shaking.

Purification

Two steps of purification were used to purify the product. First, CTT2-PEG-DSPE and CTT2 were extracted from the reaction mixture using diethyl ether (Figure 1). Second, CTT2-PEG-DSPE was separated from CTT2 using HPLC gel filtration (Figure 2).

The reaction mixture (1 ml) was incubated with 5 ml diethyl ether at -20°C for 1 hour. It was then centrifuged at 13000 rpm for 10 min in a centrifuge that is pre-cooled down to +4°C. The pellet was re-suspended in 5 ml cold diethyl ether and centrifuged again. The pellet was lyophilized for 1 hour.

The pellet was dissolved in 100 µl of 50 mM ammonium acetate buffer + 0,1% TFA, pH 4.5, which is the mobile phase in HPLC. Fifty microlitres of the sample was injected at a time. An isocratic run of 1 ml/min was carried out in the AKTA Purifier 10 (Amersham) with the Superdex 75 10/300 GL gel filtration column (Amersham, 1.5 ml) for 1.5 x column volume. The detection wavelength was 221 nm, with detection at wavelengths 230 and 280 nm for additional information. The fraction(s) containing the product was lyophilized, followed by the re-suspension in 400 µl of water and lyophilization again in order to remove the ammonium acetate.

The amount of the product was measured by a modified version of the Rousell assay as described below. MALDI-TOF analysis was used to confirm the purity and the identity of the product (Figures 3(a), 3(b) and 3(c)). The integrity of the cyclic structure of the CTT2 peptide was verified by the Ellman's test as described below. For long-term preservation, the lyophilized product can be preserved in dry surroundings at -20°C.

Determination of the coupling efficiency

Each molecule of the product CTT2-PEG-DSPE contains one molecule of phospholipid DSPE. Therefore, by measuring the concentration of the phospholipid DSPE, the concentration of the product is obtained. The phospholipid concentration was measured by a
 5 modification of the Rousell assay (Böttcher *et al.*, 1961).

Ten microlitres of the product were added to one glass tube containing 0.2 ml of perchloric acid, and heated for 30 min at 180°C to 190°C. To make the phosphate standard series, 0
 10 µl, 10 µl, 25 µl, 50 µl, 75 µl, 100 µl, 150 µl, and 200 µl of 0.4 mM Na₂HPO₄ solution were added to 8 glass tubes containing 0.2 ml perchloric acid/tube. After heating and cooling down the sample, 2 ml of molybdenate reagent (3.5 mM (NH₄)₆Mo₇O₂₄ and 1% H₂SO₄) was added to each tube containing the sample and the phosphate standard series. 0.25 ml of ascorbic acid/tube was added as well. The tubes were incubated in boiling water for 5 min
 15 and cooled down. The absorbance was measured at 812 nm. The values of the absorbance of the phosphate standard were used to make a linear regression function and the concentration of the sample was calculated using the function.

By comparing the amount of the product and the amount of the starting material, the yield
 20 of the coupling reaction can be calculated. In average, the coupling yield was around 15%. Therefore, the starting material of one milligram of CTT2 peptide and 2.05 milligrams of DSPE-PEG-NHS would produce approximately 0.5 milligrams of CTT2-PEG-DSPE.

Ellman's test

25 This assay has conventionally been used for peptides (3 to 26mer) with a single Cys residue present, but it is feasible for multiple Cys residues as well. 5,5'-dithio-bis-(2-nitrobenzoic acid) known as DNTB can be used for quantification of free sulfhydryl groups in solution. A solution of this compound produces a quantifiable yellow-coloured product when it reacts with free sulfhydryl groups to yield a mixed disulfide and 2-nitro-5-
 30 thiobenzoic acid (TNB). A sulfhydryl group can be quantified by reference to the extinction coefficients of DNTB. Sulfhydryl groups in cyclic peptides are not present, because the cysteines are linked together through S-S bonds. When a cyclic peptide is reduced, the sulfhydryl groups can be quantified with Ellman's test. This test can be used for making sure that cyclic peptide is still in active form.

The test was performed using Ellman's reagent according to the instructions of the manufacturer (Pierce). The results were measured spectrophotometrically at 412 nm. If the value was bigger than 0.020, the peptide was no longer active. Otherwise the cyclic structure of the peptide was still intact. It was shown that the coupling procedure did not disturb the cyclic structure of the CTT2-peptide. However, this test should be performed on each new batch of coupled peptide to validate the quality.

CTT2-coated liposomal doxorubicin

It has been shown that the incubation of some lipids with liposomes can result in the incorporation of the lipids into the liposomes (Kanda *et al.*, 1982). The exact mechanism is not known yet. This could happen either through the fusion of the micelle to the liposome, the micelle being formed automatically in an aqueous solution when the lipid concentration is above the critical micellar concentration (CMC), or through the exchange of phospholipids between the micelle and the liposome. As an example, we prepared the CTT2 peptide-coated liposomal doxorubicin by incorporating the CTT2-PEG-DSPE micelle with pre-formed liposomal doxorubicin. In the experiments we used both commercially available liposomal doxorubicin injection composition (Doxil®/Caelyx®) and liposomal doxorubicin prepared in our laboratory (data not shown). We further demonstrated the improved biodistribution profile and the therapeutic efficacy of the CTT2 peptide-coated Doxil®/Caelyx®.

CTT2-coated Doxil®/Caelyx®

One milligram of CTT2-PEG-DSPE was suspended in 400 µl of buffer (100 mM histidine, 55 mM sucrose, pH 6.5). To 1 ml Doxil®/Caelyx® solution (Ortho Biotech), 100 µl of the CTT2-PEG-DSPE micelle suspension was added. The mixture was incubated at +60°C for 30 min. The suspension was then ready to be injected to mice or humans. The suspension can also be preserved at +4°C for at least 3 weeks.

The incorporation efficiency can be measured by using radioisotope-labelled peptide and gel-filtration to separate the unreacted micelle from the liposome. The incorporation efficiency is represented by the percentage of the activity in liposome fractions out of the total activity. Different incubation times and temperatures were tested, and the incubation at

+60°C for 30 min was found to be the optimal reaction conditions. The efficiency of incorporation under these conditions was close to 100%. Based on the average size and surface area of the liposomes, the amount of CTT2 peptide per liposome can be calculated. Under the reaction conditions described above, there are approximately 500 pieces of CTT2 molecules per liposome. Therefore, this amount of CTT2 peptide attached should give the liposome high enough targeting activity.

The leakage of doxorubicin from the liposomes after the incorporation experiments at different reaction times and temperatures were determined by comparing the amount of free doxorubicin before and after the experiment. The leakage was found to be minimal (the leakage before the incorporation was in average 4.5% and after the reaction in average 4.2%).

***In vivo* studies of CTT2-coated Doxil®/Caelyx®**

In order to show the targeting capacity of the CTT2 peptide, we compared the biodistribution profiles and the therapeutic efficacies of the Doxil®/Caelyx® injection with and without the CTT2 coating. The biodistribution studies with the radioisotope-labelled CTT2 peptide were first performed on xenograft mice bearing different types of human tumours. The highest accumulation of this peptide was observed in ovarian carcinoma xenografts. Thus, the A2780 ovarian carcinoma mouse model was chosen for the subsequent biodistribution and therapy studies.

Biodistribution studies

A2780 ovarian carcinoma cells were cultured in RPMI 1640 medium (Biowhittaker) containing 10% fetal calf serum (Biowhittaker). After harvesting of the cells, 5.0×10^6 cells were injected subcutaneously into posterior flank of 5-6-week-old NMRI nude female mice. The biodistribution study was performed when the tumour size had become about 10 mm in diameter. A2780 ovarian carcinoma-bearing mice were injected with the liposomal doxorubicin dose of 9 mg doxorubicin/kg via a tail vein. Mice were killed 2h, 6h, 24h, 48h, 72h and 96h after the injection for the collection of blood, heart, liver, kidney, lung, muscle, brain, spleen and tumour samples. The blood was centrifuged at 5000 rpm for 10 min at +4°C to obtain plasma. The tissues were frozen in liquid nitrogen and lyophilized for two days in dark. The dried tissues were weighed and extracted with acid alcohol (0.3M HCl in 50% EtOH) to obtain the final concentration of 20 mg/ml. The tissue homogenates were

centrifuged at 13 000 x g for 10 min at +4°C. The cleared plasma and the cleared tissue extracts were determined for doxorubicin fluorescence using spectrofluorometer (Varian). Doxorubicin fluorescence was analysed by monitoring the fluorescence intensity at 590 nm using excitation wavelength of 470 nm, and comparing with standard samples containing
5 known amounts of doxorubicin that had been processed in the same manner.

The AUC of CTT2-coated Doxil®/Caelyx (CTT-SL) accumulation in tumour was 46.2% higher than the tumour accumulation of Doxil®/Caelyx® (SL) over a period of 96 hours (Figure 4). This shows the significant increase in the tumour targeting capacity of CTT2-
10 coated Doxil®/Caelyx®.

Therapeutic efficacy in xenograft mice

A2780 cells were injected subcutaneously into the posterior flanks of 50 NMRI nude female mice. The mice were allocated randomly into five treatment groups. To investigate the effect of different treatments on survival, the mice were treated with drugs when the
15 tumour size had grown 5 mm in diameter (65 mm³). In this study, the mice received three drug injections of 9 mg liposomal or free doxorubicin / kg in three-day intervals. Doxorubicin concentration in CTT2-coated Doxil®/Caelyx (CTT-SL), Doxil®/Caelyx (SL) and free formulations was 2 mg/ml and thus the injection volumes varied between 120–150 µl. The mice were weighed and their tumour sizes were measured twice a week after treatment
20 initiation. When tumour sizes exceeded 1000 mm³ the mice were sacrificed.

By five weeks after treatment initiation all mice which were treated with buffer, with CTT2-micelle or with free doxorubicin had been sacrificed and only 33% of Doxil®/Caelyx-treated mice were alive. However, at the same time 75% of CTT2-coated
25 Doxil®/Caelyx-treated mice were still alive (Figure 5). Mean survival time for CTT2-coated Doxil®/Caelyx group was 38.6 days and for Doxil®/Caelyx 27.9 days.

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Claims

1. A method of preparing a targeting composition having tumour-targeting capacity, comprising covalently attaching a hydrophilic peptide to a synthetic derivative of polyethylene glycol.
5
2. The method according to claim 1, wherein the hydrophilic peptide is a matrix metalloproteinase inhibitor.
- 10 3. The method according claim 2, wherein the matrix metalloproteinase inhibitor is the cyclic GRENYHGCTTHWGFTLC peptide (CTT2).
4. The method according to claim 1, wherein the synthetic derivative of polyethylene glycol is DSPE-PEG.
15
5. The method according to claim 4, wherein the DSPE-PEG is DSPE-PEG-NHS.
6. The method according to claim 1, wherein the hydrophilic peptide is amidated cyclic GRENYHGCTTHWGFTLC peptide and the synthetic derivative of polyethylene glycol is
20 DSPE-PEG-NHS.
7. A method for preparing a therapeutic or imaging liposome composition, comprising the steps of
 - 25 (a) obtaining liposomes carrying at least one chemotherapeutic agent or an imaging agent,
 - (b) preparing a targeting composition having tumour-targeting capacity, by covalently attaching a hydrophilic peptide to a synthetic derivative of polyethylene glycol, and
 - (c) combining the liposomes and the targeting composition to form a suspension.
- 30 8. A method for treating cancer in a patient, comprising the steps of
 - (a) obtaining liposomes carrying at least one chemotherapeutic agent,
 - (b) obtaining a targeting composition comprising
 - (1) a hydrophilic peptide and
 - (2) a synthetic derivative of polyethylene glycol,

- (c) combining the liposomes and the targeting composition to form a suspension, and
- (d) administering the suspension obtained to the patient.

5 9. The method according to claim 7 or 8, wherein the hydrophilic peptide is a matrix metalloproteinase inhibitor.

10. The method according claim 9, wherein the matrix metalloproteinase inhibitor is the cyclic GRENYHGCTTHWGFTLC peptide (CTT2).

10 11. The method according to claim 7 or 8, wherein the synthetic derivative of polyethylene glycol is DSPE-PEG.

12. The method according to claim 11, wherein the DSPE-PEG is DSPE-PEG-NHS.

15 13. The method according to claim 7 or 8, wherein the chemotherapeutic agent is doxorubicin.

14. The method according to claim 7 or 8, wherein the chemotherapeutic agent is doxorubicin, the hydrophilic peptide is amidated cyclic GRENYHGCTTHWGFTLC peptide and
20 the synthetic derivative of polyethylene glycol is DSPE-PEG-NHS.

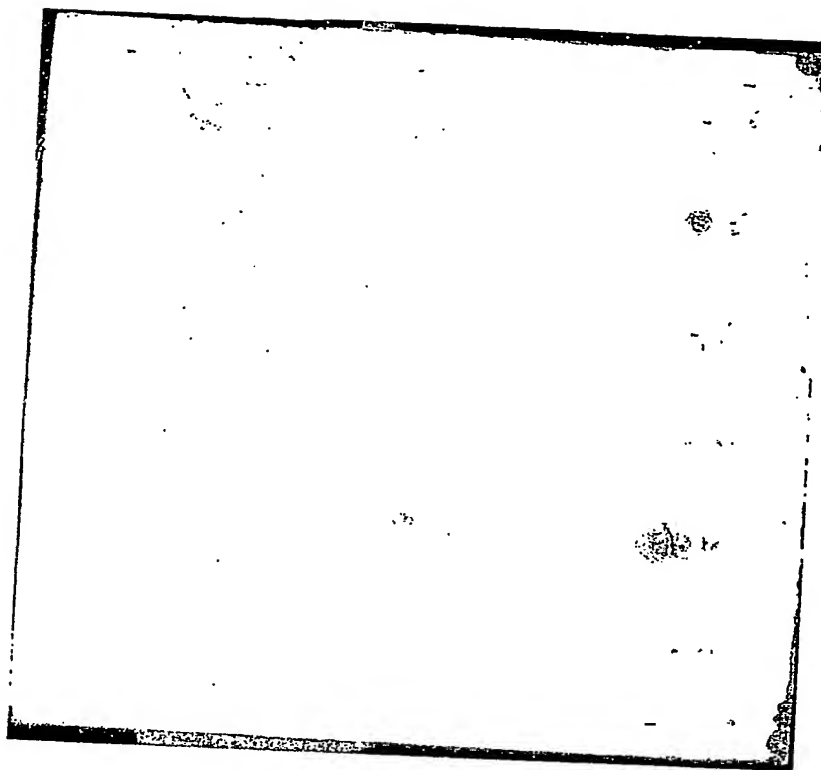
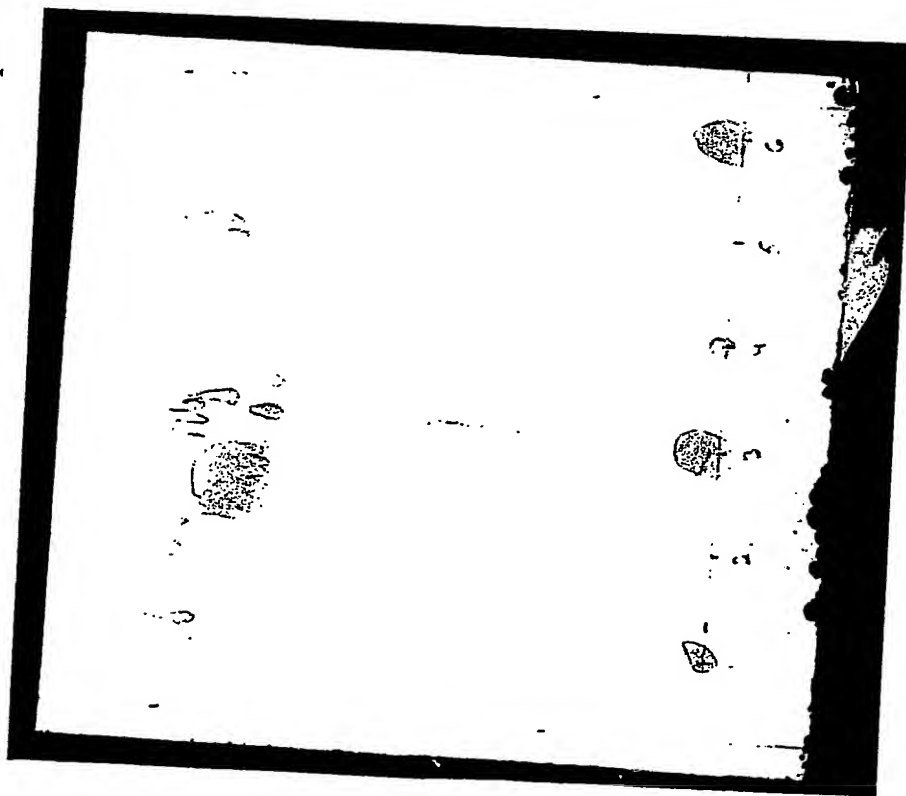
15. A diagnostic or imaging test kit for carrying out a diagnostic method for detecting a suspected tumour in a patient, wherein the test kit comprises
- a targeting composition comprising a hydrophilic peptide and a synthetic derivative of
25 polyethylene glycol, and
- liposomes carrying at least one imaging agent.

16. A diagnostic or imaging composition, comprising
- a targeting composition comprising a hydrophilic peptide and a synthetic derivative of
30 polyethylene glycol, and
- liposomes carrying at least one imaging agent.

(57) Abstract

5 The present invention relates to targeted cancer therapy and concerns specifically preparation of a liposomal therapeutic substance, which is coated with small matrix metalloproteinase inhibitors to improve the targeting of liposomes to cancer cells, and to enhance the uptake thereof to such cells. The invention provides therapeutic and imaging liposome compositions and a method for preparing such compositions, as well as a method for treating or diagnosing cancer.

Figure 1. Thin layer chromatography (TLC) analysis of the coupling reaction. Lane 1, CTT2 peptide control; Lane 2, DSPE-PEG-NHS control; Lane 5, the supernatant after the diethyl ether; Lane 8, the pellet suspension after the diethyl ether treatment.



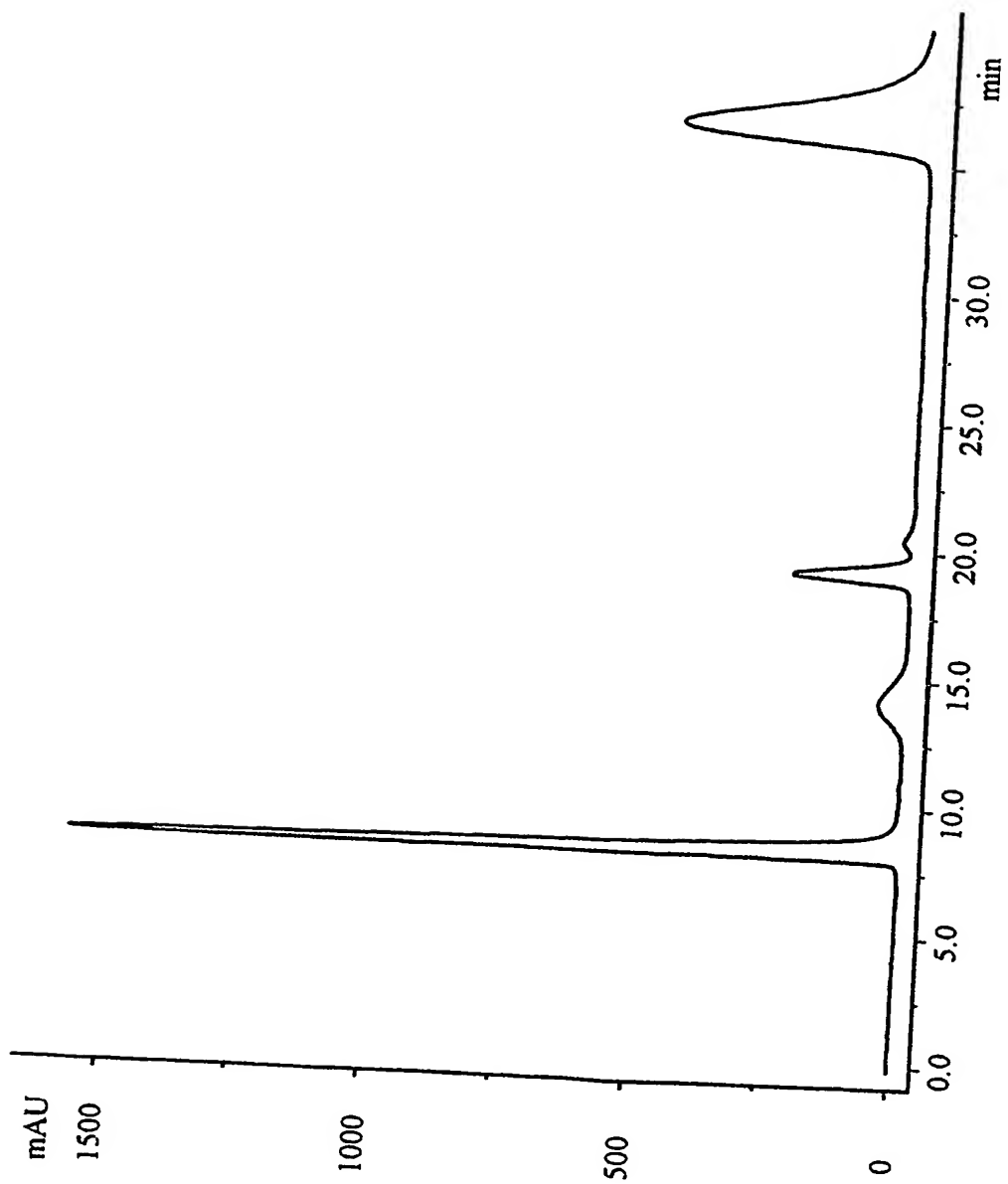
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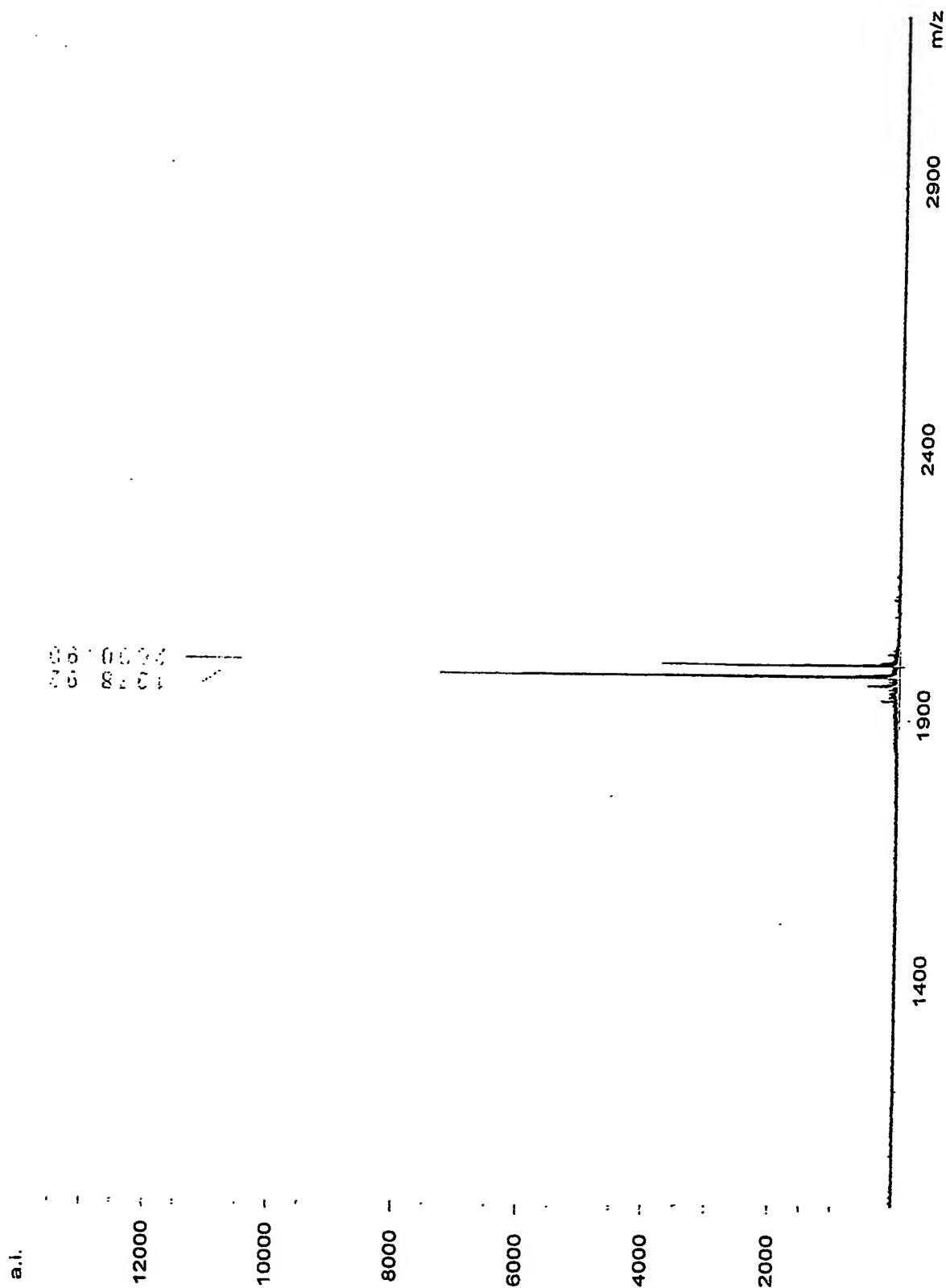
Figure 2.



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Figure 3a.



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Figure 3b.

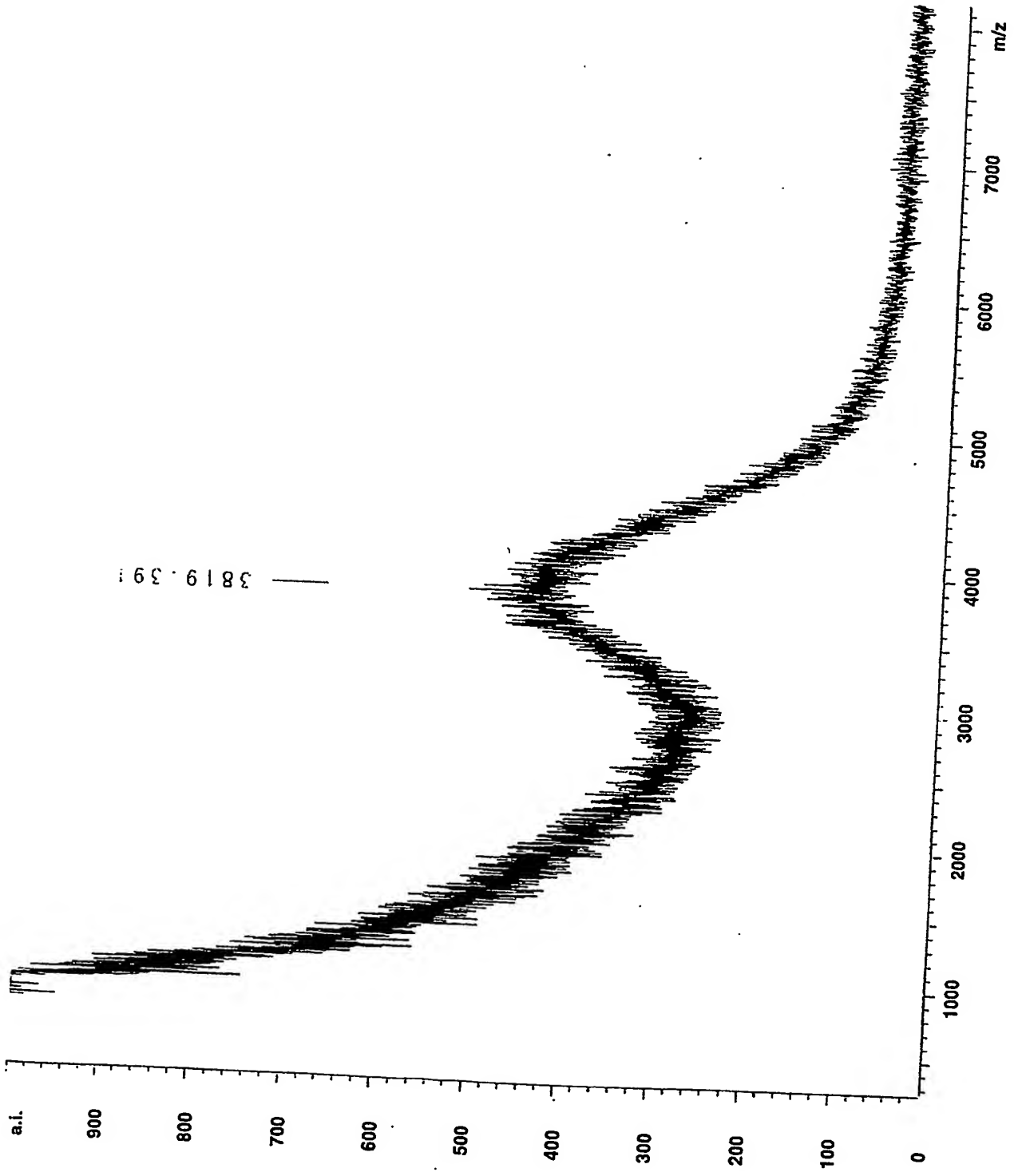
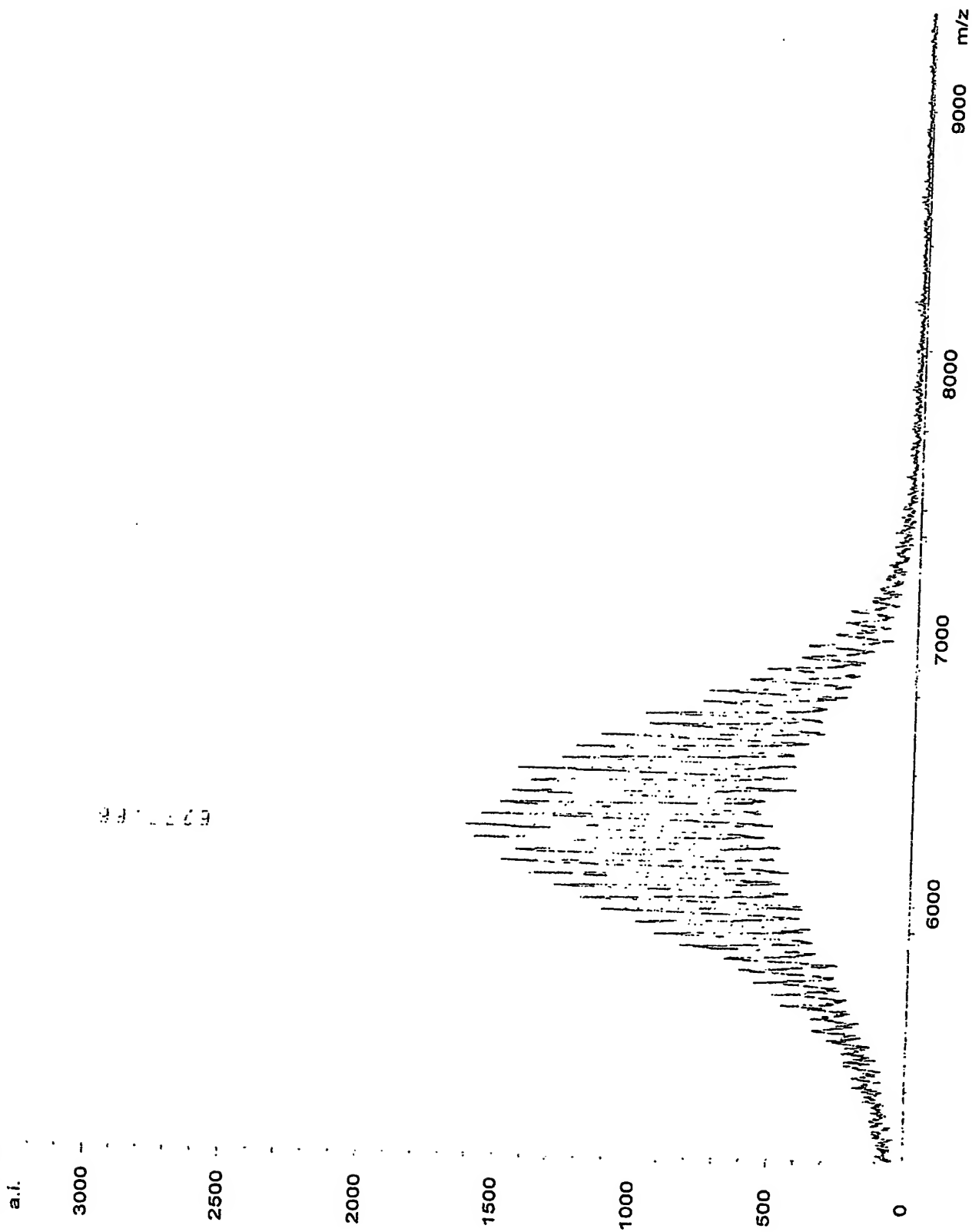


Figure 3c



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Figure 4.

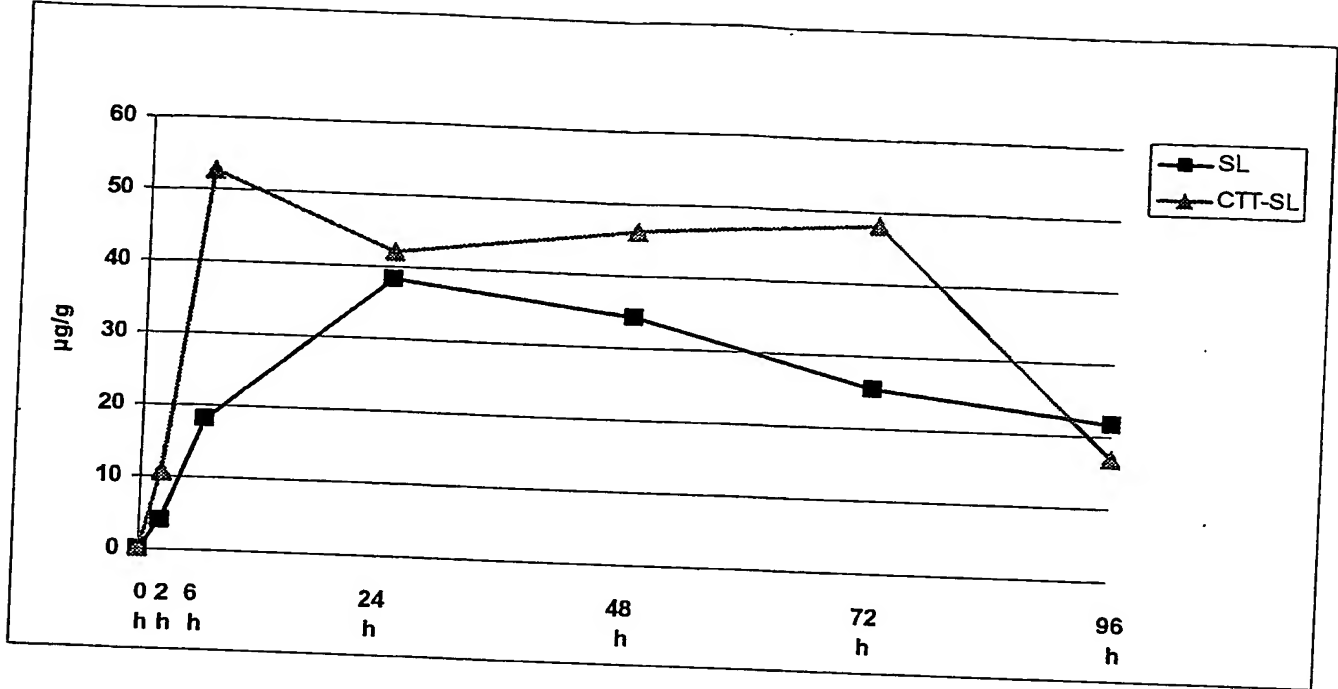
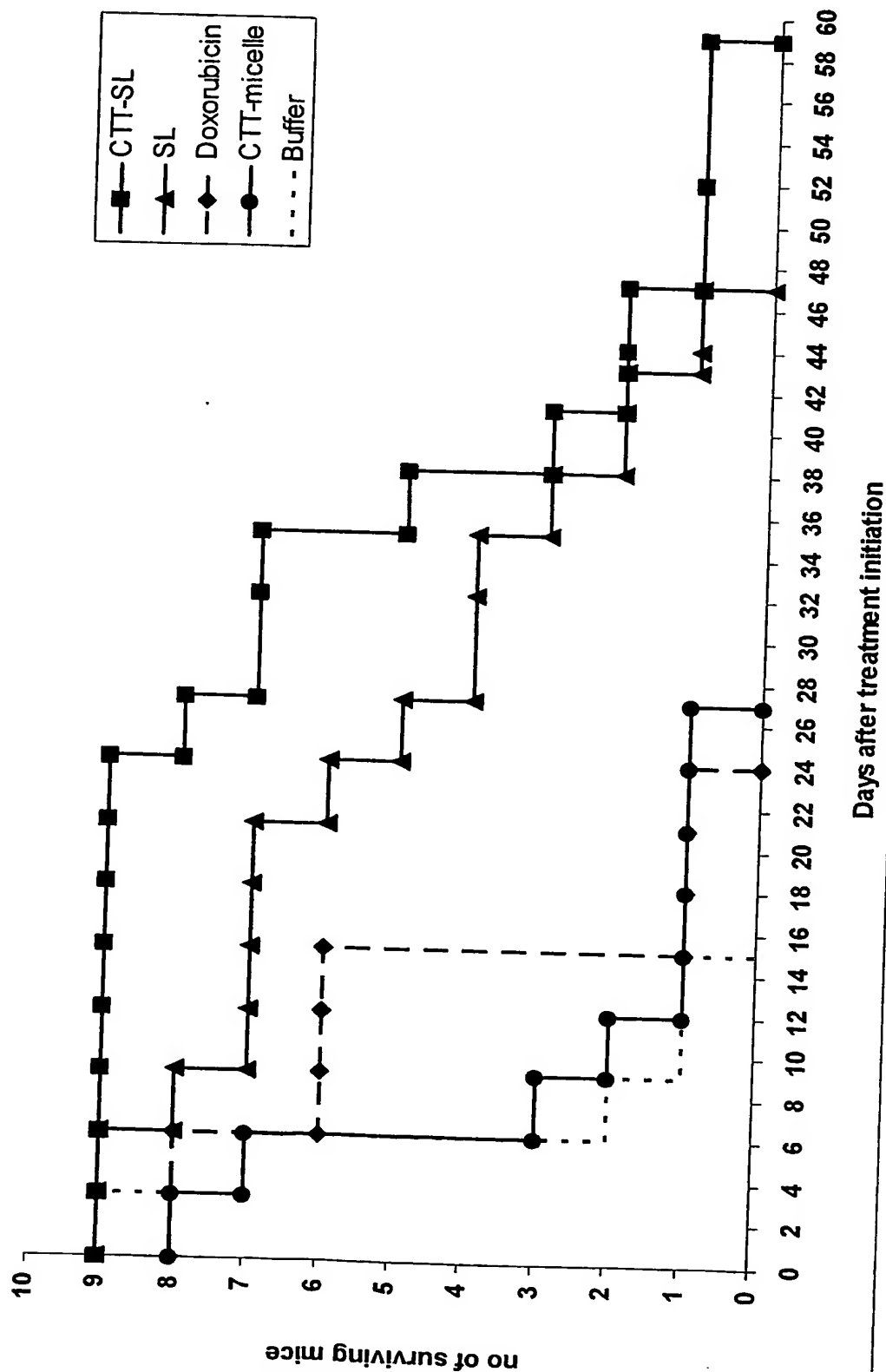


Figure 5.



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International application number: PCT/FI04/050150

International filing date: 15 October 2004 (15.10.2004)

Document type: Certified copy of priority document

Document details: Country/Office: FI
Number: 20031528
Filing date: 17 October 2003 (17.10.2003)

Date of receipt at the International Bureau: 28 December 2004 (28.12.2004)

Remark: Priority document submitted or transmitted to the International Bureau in compliance with Rule 17.1(a) or (b)



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